

Perceptions of European Identity among EU Citizens: An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT

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EU citizens' perceptions of European identity say much about the process of European integration and the development of EU institutions. This study explores European identity as it is described by EU citizens who positively identify themselves with Europe and the EU. This objective is approached through the following research questions: in which contexts are individuals aware of feeling "European" and in which contexts are they aware of feeling their respective national identities? How does European identity relate to national identity? To what extent is European identity developed by EU policy and to what extent does it emerge through individuals themselves? What kinds of communicative actions stimulate European identity? And how does foreign language proficiency affect sense of European identity? This research is significant for the reason that understanding how individuals identify with others influences how they perceive their own interests and therefore influences how they act and organize politically.

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Perrceptions of European Identity among EU Citizens: An Empirical Study

I. Introduction

Communicative action, Jurgen Habermas (1981) proposed, is not only an avenue toward increasing cultural knowledge and facilitating mutual understanding; it is also the process by which we form our identities. As the European Union did not emerge from a war of independence or a popular revolution, but rather evolved out of the desire that economic cooperation among sovereign nations would keep them from warring with each other (Fligstein 2008: 3; Triandafyllidou 2008: 261-2), EU political identity has not been galvanized in the same way that many national identities have been. Communicative action, then, may provide a particularly vital means for the development of shared identity among EU citizens. It is my hypothesis that individuals who identify themselves with Europe often conceive of their European identity as a representation of their own intercultural communication competence coupled with a sense of the opportunities this competence affords them as a result of European integration. In this regard, European

identity becomes something tangible and descriptive, yet flexible enough to fill varied goals and needs.

Thomas Risse (2008) has argued that a lack of European identity among European citizens is not among the EU's major problems. Rather, the more important question is *how* citizens identify themselves with Europe. In other words, we must try to understand what it means substantively when European identity is invoked (Risse 2008). It is the aim of this paper to contribute to an understanding of what European identity means to individuals who claim it and how such identity is formed. I will explore qualitatively the development and perception of European identity in EU citizens who positively identify themselves with Europe and the EU for the reason that understanding how individuals identify with others influences how they perceive their own interests and therefore influences how they act and organize politically (Gutmann 2001).

This objective will be approached through the following research questions: in which contexts are individuals aware of feeling "European" and in which contexts are they aware of feeling their respective national identities? How does European identity relate to national identity? To what extent is European identity developed by EU policy and to what extent does it emerge through individuals themselves? What kinds of communicative actions stimulate European identity? And how does foreign language proficiency affect sense of European identity? These issues are particularly relevant in light of the debate and referendum rejecting the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland and the movement of the Italian right to set quotas on the internal migration of EU citizens, to recall only a few recent matters in which the idea of European identity is affecting policy and public sentiments. Insight into these questions can also begin to alleviate the EU's

democratic deficit by enhancing knowledge of how to improve education for democratic citizenship in the EU and in other supranational entities that aspire to democracy.

A qualitative study modeled on the work of Anna Triandafyllidou (2008) and based on the grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss 1967) has been adopted for this research to analyze the relationship between European identity and the communicative actions that stimulate it. Twenty-three in-depth, open ended interviews conducted in 2008 with men and women from ten member states in various regions of and waves of accession to the European Union form the empirical core of this paper. Participants were selected on the basis that they positively identified themselves with the European Union. All interviewees were between the ages of 20 and 38. This limited sample of ages was not sought intentionally but does seem to bolster the ideas of Paul Hopper (2006) and others regarding a "European class"—young, educated, and privileged with resources and mobility—who find it much easier to take advantage of the benefits of a unified Europe.

Let us be clear: examining European identity through those who already identify themselves with a political Europe hinders analysis of variation among European identities (which there certainly is). It furthermore evades study of why many individuals do not identify with Europe at all. However, what the population represented here *does* do is to help us investigate how and why individuals identify themselves with Europe.

This research is valuable because it explores the feeling and reasoning of European identifiers, who are spoken of frequently, but less often given voice in academic studies of European identity. As with Triandafyllidou's work, the presentation of this study seeks to complement the results of quantitative studies like the

Eurobarometer surveys and perhaps to contribute to the formulation of new questions for quantitative researchers.

Three major sections will structure this paper. The first offers a theoretical background to the study. I will look at the relevance of identity in democracy, briefly discussing the development of identities associated with nationalism and then looking at a democracy's need to build social capital. In the second section, I will explain the research design and methodology for my qualitative study, including a description of how participants were selected and how interviews were conducted.

In the third section, I will relate the findings of my study. These will be organized into three subsections. The first will deal with the contexts in which participants reported awareness or feelings of connection to a European identity. The next will deal with the contexts in which participants reported feeling particularly connected to their national identity, and the third will analyze relationships between these two frequently interconnected sets of feelings. In this subsection, I will assess how European identity is often invoked for purposes of utility and for purposes of self-representation and self-differentiation. By contrast, interviewees almost never used these particular frames of reference in discussions of national identity. Rather, national identity tended to be described in terms of group characteristics and the extent to which the individual identified with (or did not identify with) these group characteristics.

In this way, I will try to show how experiences in communication help to solidify what is meant by “European identity.” While Fligstein (2008) maintains that individuals who identify themselves with Europe are therefore more likely to support EU policy, I will try to reflect the sentiment among interviewees that European identity will lead to

support for EU policy so long as those policies acknowledge their interests in communication and continue to offer them opportunities for improved communication skills. And while Triandafyllidou (2008) holds that determining a proper external “Other” is the measure by which European identity is found, I will present findings that suggest an internal, national “Other” might be a greater stimulus for identification with Europe and the EU. The Other from within represents communication skills and sentiments which an individual may feel he knows well but which do not describe him adequately. Thus, European identity presents itself as an indicator of aspiration and perceived accomplishment for individuals and social groups, as well as a way of distinguishing oneself from the parameters of one’s national identity.

II. Identity and Democracy

Hooghe and Marks have observed that "political institutions that lack emotional resonance are unlikely to last...Identity—emotional attachment to community—appears vital" (2008: 15). The importance of identity in politics and polities—not least of all democracies—cannot be underestimated. As mentioned above, how people self-identify and with whom they identify determines how they perceive their interests and therefore how they express themselves politically (Gutman 2001: 15).

That the EU does not currently mobilize loyalties to the same extent as more deeply rooted identities, such as nationalities and religious groups, does not condemn it to irrelevance. European identity, by many accounts, is an identity in the making, and the form it takes is and will be different from existing political and social identities (Diez 2008: 710). Charles Taylor recalls Hugo Grotius' vision of society as individuals who come together to form a political entity against some sort of moral background. Feeling such a moral background, Grotius maintains, is a natural right and allows for the legitimization of political authority, because by organizing themselves in this way, individuals have given their consent (Taylor 2002: 93). Tracing moral backgrounds,

however, does not always lead us down a straight path, as social identities are constructed continuously, selecting and modifying the background upon which they see themselves. This is the way in which democracy presents such an appealing form of social and political organization, as it offers reliable cycles and processes through which to reevaluate background and direction. To clarify, we might look at the example of the United States' democracy, in which American citizens may rely on the opportunity to vote for a president every four years or to have a perceived injustice reviewed and evaluated through a timely trial in a court of law.

Since the flowering of nationalism in the late 18th and 19th centuries, one of the most compelling arguments for the nation-state has been the idea that it enables equality among compatriots. The nation was—and perhaps still is—conceived of as a deep, horizontal comradeship, powerful enough to drive people to sacrifice their lives for the good of the community (Anderson 1983). Benedict Anderson (1983) described this phenomenon as an “imagined community”—one in which most people will never know one another, but feel deeply connected to each other nonetheless. The rationale was as follows. For instance:

If 'Hungarians' deserved a national state, then that meant Hungarians, all of them; it meant a state in which the ultimate locus of sovereignty had to be the collectivity of Hungarian speakers and readers; and in due course, the liquidation of serfdom, the promotion of popular education, the expansion of suffrage, and so on... (81-2)

Of course, nationalism does not necessarily entail respect for liberal values. It does, however, call for a system in which civic values are shared or imposed. A common

language can be—but does not have to be—such a value. But for Anderson and for his example of the Hungarians, devotion to nation also meant devotion to a mother-tongue and to others able to speak it.

Karl Deutsch also identified communication as the central force in the creation of a national identity. Fligstein carries this forward to say that sharing a national “story” could inspire the effort necessary for democratic state construction and that once state institutions were in place, they would then promote and reproduce the story (2008: 16). And so the state, as it were, could fulfill its duty to create connections among people.

Without the ability to communicate, individuals are unlikely to develop a shared identity. While communication alone does not yield common identity, we may observe that having the ability to communicate does tend to confidence in social organization. Modernity has rendered language the primary vehicle of social communication, and hence, it is no surprise that language has become a cornerstone of modern state organization—i.e. nationalism and its development of national identity.

Common language alone is neither necessary nor sufficient for developing common identity. But what is in fact necessary is a shared content in communication, such as values. Modern communication technologies allow us to see, to an unprecedented extent, the ranges and depths of perspectives held in our own civil society and in others. In *Living with Globalization*, Paul Hopper (2006) discusses these advances can challenge common identities that have been rooted in shared values. Such technological progress, says Hopper, coupled with the increasing interdependence of global economies and societies, have been perceived as contributing to an "age of uncertainty," in which formerly clear-cut identities, structures, and beliefs are prone to blur (39). The freedom of

individual choice with which these developments present us tends to ignite insecurities even higher—insecurities that may be felt as personal inadequacies for relating to others as well as mistrust for the unknown values of those others (Hopper 2006: 39).

III. Cosmopolitanism

The systemization of values, then, might be seen as an attractive tool for encouraging individuals to feel as though they can participate in or be welcomed into groups where their thoughts will be shared and respected—a feeling that facilitates communication. Cosmopolitanism is one such attempt at systemization. It seeks to bridge gaps between more condensed value systems in order to overcome the absence of a shared vehicle for communication in addition to the possible absence of a shared content.

If we consider that the political entity of Europe lacks many standard vehicles of communication, such as common language or unified culture, European identity might then be seen as requiring some form of a “cosmopolitan” attitude. Cosmopolitanism focuses on the notion that individuals and groups can and must interact with diverse cultural sources and accept the possibility of living with and learning from these encounters (Baban and Keyman 2008: 109, Hopper 2006: 65). It therefore offers an intuitive path toward reconciling diverse cultural, social, and individual sources of

identity. As such, cosmopolitan views might offer a content that makes it possible to overcome the absence of these vehicles of communication.

Finding overlap between our own layers of identity and those of others—even seemingly distant others—is one of the ways in which social capital can be built. Robert Putnam (1991) has shown that democracy is rendered more responsive and effective when voluntary associations and social capital are well-developed. DeTocqueville thought likewise and emphasized that civic associations in the United States were what enabled the fledgling democracy to grow (Faught 2007: 55). Encouraging civic association requires mobilization of basic, practical elements of individual identity. Language is such an element, and one concrete way in which an individual might find he feels an added layer of identity is through the acquisition of a new language. Thus, in examining the development of European identity, it is not surprising that discussion turns frequently to the study of Europe's languages.

IV. Language

The EU boasts 22 official languages and is host and neighbor to perhaps as many as 275 unofficial languages in the geographical region of Europe (Skutnabb-Kangas 2002: 7). Clearly, it would be impossible for any individual to communicate in all of these languages. Yet one may hypothesize that the personal investments made in learning any language beyond one's mother tongue are great enough to shape an individual's identity (Anderson 1983: 148). If those investments are undertaken by choice, they may do much to fuel interest in seeing and taking part in Deutsch's idea of a shared story.

Foreign language use can be a powerful indicator of social interaction (Fligstein 2008). As mentioned, the investments of time and energy required for proficiency in a new language are substantial enough that foreign language communication may illustrate an individual's intentions to communicate with another group or culture in a meaningful way (Fligstein 2008). The Council of Europe emphasizes that

[A]s an individual's experience of language expands...he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative

competence in which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact.

(CEFR 4)

We might then consider that language is not only one of the most important markers of social and cultural identity, but also a means by which we construct our identities (Haarman 1999: 68; Starkey 2002: 9). This construction may represent economic, social, or personal decisions. But regardless, deciding to pursue foreign language communication creates space within already complex identities and allows for identification with other individuals and communities in a meaningful way. Consequently, we may begin to see a cycle. If institutions tend to reinforce shared identity and shared identity tends to increase motivation for establishing common institutions, language learning illustrates this process on a more specific level. Language learning among EU citizens may have the potential to be a vehicle toward an additive European identity while those who identify with the European Union may be more inclined to pursue study of further European languages.

V. Understandings of European Identity

Bo Strath has pointed out that "exactly what is meant by the concept of European identity is unclear" (2006: 430). The question of European identity has held a place in the study of European integration since the early stages of the Europeanization process (Hooghe and Marks 2008: 15). By the late 1950s, Ernest Haas and Karl Deutsch had already theorized that identity and sense of community would be valuable indicators of integration (Hooghe and Marks: 15-16). Hooghe and Marks trace the path of European identity theories to Ronald Inglehart (1967, 1970), who posited the idea of generational replacement, in which individuals become socialized to receive public goods from the supranational (in this case, European) entity rather than the national one (in Hooghe and Marks 2008: 16). Hooghe and Marks note that Karl Deutsch (1966) disagreed, observing that national communication networks were expanding much more rapidly than European ones. This idea lent itself well to the theory of intergovernmentalism, which became the dominant interpretation of European integration following the collapse of the Bretton

Woods arrangement in the early 1970s and the period of retrenchment that followed (Hooghe and Marks 2008: 16).

Strath, on the other hand, begins his trajectory here, with the European Community Summit that took place in Copenhagen in 1973 (Strath 2006: 430). The objective in Copenhagen was to rescue the integration project from the economic troubles it was encountering. A document titled the “Declaration on European Identity” was published to affirm that Europeans shared commitment to essential values such as social justice and economic progress.

Strath saw the document and the concept of European identity itself as disingenuous. It was “myth construction,” he said, meant to parallel the development of the European Community to the course of nation building that many national states undertook in the 19th century (Strath 2006: 427-8). He counters that even still, the only real source of common political identity for the citizens of Europe is their collective detachment from the “faceless, soulless, Eurocracy in Brussels” (438-9).

There is in fact tension between the various understandings of how political identity is formed. These understandings generally fall into two categories. One is the angle that identity requires a pre-existing demos—or, a people who already share some sort of content and means of conveying that content among themselves. Strath is of this camp. The opposing angle, however, views identity as something that can emerge from democratic practice. DeTocqueville, for example, observed a very distinct demos take shape through the institutions of democracy in the United States. He maintained that this demos gained strength both from the nation’s law and from its citizens’ ability and inclination to associate with each other for the sake of varied interests. In a similar way,

Friedrich Nietzsche saw the development of deep historical consciousness as the democratic practice which would allow for European identity and a European demos to gain strength. He hoped that this would offer a necessary antidote for the dangers of nineteenth century nationalism, which held up nation-states not only as political communities, but as moral ones.

Jurgen Habermas also takes the view that identity emerges from democratic practice. Specifically, Habermas believes that the practice of democracy is contingent upon a constitution. Only an EU constitution, he says, will enable European citizens to develop a common political identity (Habermas 1995, 2001, 2005). Habermas connects three key elements to the implementation of a constitution and affirms that these elements will then supply the EU with the conditions necessary for identity formation. These elements are "the emergence of a European civil society; the construction of a European-wide public sphere; and the shaping of a political culture that can be shared by all European citizens" (Habermas 2001). In other words, Habermas sees common institutions, common sources of information, and common forums for communication as the providers of common identity.

His theory of communicative action notwithstanding, Habermas' vision of the development of European identity reveals a distinctly top-down focus on how citizens would come to feel attached to and to participate in EU democracy. Such a focus discounts how individuals themselves relate to their identities. Habermas approaches the questions of European identity with the proposition that a constitution would solidify this identity as the political institutions created by the constitution "would have an inducing effect on citizens' capacity to identify with each other" (Habermas 1995: 307). He

contends that a European constitution would provide the main source of political identity, as it would activate a communicative context in which citizens would take part in the process of legislation (Habermas 2005 in Singh 2001: 120).

Habermas stresses that solidarity among citizens is a prerequisite for ensuring democratic citizenship, and that this solidarity requires a shared political culture (Bowman 2007: 740). In his 2001 essay "Why Europe Needs a Constitution," Habermas heightens the social component of his proposal through the appeal that Europe's "shared historical commitment to social justice" (Bowman 2007: 740) comprises the core of European identity, and that this legacy would be best preserved through a constitution. The welfare state, Habermas (2001) writes, is "the backbone of a society still oriented towards social, political, and cultural inclusion" and that, as such, "we Europeans have a legitimate interest in getting our voice heard in an international concert that is at present dominated by a voice quite different than ours." From this statement, we see Habermas' belief that a constitution is not the only catalyst for European identity. Rather, we observe his feeling that European identity is generated by the perception of an "Other."

Triandafyllidou (2008) arrives at a similar conclusion in her discussion of perceptions of Europe and the nation in Italy. She explains:

European identity is relational—it is formed in interaction with national identity, but also in reference to Others...that offer benchmarks against which to test who is European or what it means to be European. Perhaps a solution to the EU legitimacy deficit lies in the need for national governments and European institutions to find suitable Others in contrast

to whom the distinctiveness and unity of European identity and a European polity can be forged. (280)

For Triandafyllidou, the most decisive "others" seem to be Russia and Turkey, whereas for Habermas, Europe's Other is certainly the United States. The idea of an Other remains salient also in Thomas Risse's (forthcoming) work, but Risse tries to show how the concept of "otherness" adjusts according to the needs of particular national groups. He calls this the "marble cake model of European identity," based on the realization that European identity may be the result of different motivations, different conceptions, and different constructions and still form an identification with an entity to which they would grant political authority.

To illustrate, Risse presents the varying interpretations of EU identity in several member states. For Germany and Germans, he posits, assuming a European identity has offered an alternative to a political identity inextricably tied to militaristic nationalism. German nationalism, and the stain of racism and radical right wing carried with it, have been the presumed Other for Germans through the process of European integration. For Spain, on the other hand, Europeanization has represented modernization and human rights and a dramatic recovery from bloody authoritarianism. Once again, we see a rather ancestral Other, defined by fresh memories and stinging consequences of the relatively recent past.

Clearly, "Otherness" is an essential concept for building a frame through which to examine identity. However, perhaps equally as important as targeting "others" is noting who is *not* targeted for this role. For example, as we have examined the development of EU identity here, we have seen that the role of Other can be played by particular rival

groups or by a nation's own history, but there many potential others have not been invoked in searching for an adequate definition of European identity. For those seeking to define EU identity, non-EU but decidedly European countries such as Switzerland and Norway have not been held out as "Others." Does this suggest that EU identity is based on a cultural Europe rather than a political Europe, structured and strengthened by EU institutions? I will try to show that sense of community depends on context, and that in some contexts, one is apt to feel more community with certain people and groups than in other contexts. As such, the criteria for "Otherness" may shift. Bearing this in mind, I will proceed by trying to show that EU institutions are not irrelevant to European identity and do indeed help to construct it as they allow for a greater number of accessible and meaningful contexts in which individuals may feel a sense of "European" community.

VI. Language Learning: A Practical Context for the Development of European Identity

Foreign language learning and communication offer a specific context in which we can view how feelings of community develop through communicative acts.

Furthermore, because there are direct economic and social benefits for language learners in the European Union that become increasingly tangible as a result of European integration, language learning experiences may further the development of European identity for EU citizens. Mobility of people, goods, and ideas is a founding principle of the European Union. The Lisbon Strategy of 2000 states that the European Union strives to become the most competitive economy in the world, and it targets language skills as a key factor in achieving this goal (ELAN 2006: 8).

Tove Skutnabb-Kangas' has proposed that a post-industrial society relies upon knowledge and ideas as its primary commodities, and it transmits these commodities chiefly through language and visual images (2002: 14). As such, those with richer linguistic capabilities and skills not only tend to perform at higher levels in measures of creative intelligence and cognitive flexibility; they also have access to a greater wealth of

cultural knowledge, ideas, and world views (Skutnabb-Kangas 2002: 14). The importance of learning, and especially the depth of social and cultural understanding accessible through language learning, is also emphasized by the 1992 OECD study of educational needs:

The rapidity of structural and technological change and the decline in unskilled and semi-skilled work call for the continual renewal of knowledge and skills, beginning from a starting point where the minimum threshold for full economic and social participation rise constantly. (in O’Riagan 2002: 8)

Language learning activates not only creativity, but also knowledge of other societies and the ability to assess and interpret cultural objects (Beacco and Byram 2000: 72). The complexity of language learning may also encourage awareness of the process of learning itself.

The reality of multilingualism in Europe—a situation that predates the European Union and its law of multilingualism—has created an environment in which multilingual capacities have long been necessary and appreciated. Eurobarometer survey data reveals that 84% of Europeans believe that everyone in the EU should be able to communicate in their mother tongue plus at least one additional language (#243 2006: 65). 50% believe that all EU citizens should be able to communicate in their mother tongue plus at least two additional languages (#243 2006: 65). While these data do not necessarily indicate any identification with the EU, they do indicate a shared goal. And shared goals, as we may see, can begin to create a sense of community.

VII. Methodology and Research Design

This study is based on 23 interviews with men and women from 10 EU member states. Participants were selected on the basis that they explicitly identified themselves with Europe, the European Union, or both. The number of interviews was not absolutely predetermined, but the 24 participants for Triandafyllidou's study set a precedent. By following Triandafyllidou's lead with the grounded theory approach, each interview was searched for added value in reference to the previous one in terms of interpretive frames (Triandafyllidou 2008: 266). As Triandafyllidou did, I then made a list of the interpretive frames that interviewees used to illustrate their conceptions of European identity and their experiences with it, as well as conceptions they related of their respective national, regional, and local identities and experiences with those. I also noted their rhetorical strategies, looking at uses of the first person singular and the first person plural, as well as disclaimer clauses, such as "I don't know, but I think..." or "In my

opinion...". An initial questionnaire recorded demographic information and educational backgrounds.

The participants in this study nearly all fit within the demographic category the Eurobarometer surveys classify as "young Europeans," or those ages 15-29. All but two participants fell into this age range. Eurobarometer survey 47, "Worries of Europeans," groups young Europeans into three general attitudes toward the EU. The first, "sympathizers," are those who support a powerful, policy-making EU. According to this particular survey, taken in 1997 and therefore including only the first 10 member states, 38% of young Europeans could be called sympathizers. The second, "positive pragmatists," represent those who are less eager to give policy-making powers to the EU, yet still feel that much of European integration is beneficial. These account for 33% of young people. The final grouping is labeled "skeptics"—the 28% of young people who hold mainly negative feelings toward the EU or are simply apathetic toward it. The survey summary makes clear that this skepticism and or negativity is not limited to thoughts about the EU, but also extends to their feelings about their own nations and their personal lives. By nature of the method of selecting participants for this study, the 23 interviewees might all be called sympathizers or positive pragmatists. Thus, we might neglect nearly one-third of the demographic group in this study. However, our goal is not to represent young people as a group, but to describe how European identity develops and what motivates people to identify themselves with the European Union.

Interviews were conducted in spaces suggested by the interviewees, typically in a quiet, public venue. I presented myself as a researcher and an outsider to Europe, and I explained that I was interested in the various layers of the interviewee's own social and

political identity and the contexts in which they were felt. The research questions listed in the opening of this paper were used in a casual manner, and preference was given to the flow of an interviewee's narrative during the course of the interview.

VIII. Findings

The findings of this research have been organized to reveal the three components that Risse calls "the substance of identity": that is, the content of the expressed identity, how it is contested and by whom or what, and also the strength or the degree to which an individual or group is willing to defend the integrity of that particular identity. We will look primarily to the content and contestation of European and national identities for interviewees, as the strength of European identity remains difficult to measure. Measurement of strength requires analysis of sacrifices made for the sake of European identity. However, the opportunities for such sacrifice have been very limited. Gutmann has observed how the content of identity is defined by context along with the interest that drives the identification (2001: 18). Thus, we will look at the contexts described by interviewees in which thoughts, feelings, and reactions appeared indicative of interviewee's European or national identities. We will look also at how these contexts relate to each other, what contests them, and what reaffirms them. As participants referred often to communicative acts to illustrate how they conceived of their identities,

we will give special attention to analyzing those actions, such as foreign language communication and learning.

Contexts of Feeling European

Asked to think about when they were aware of feeling "European," interviewees' responses tended to fall into one of the following three general, often overlapping themes: to express the utility of European integration for themselves personally and for larger groups with which they were associated, to express personal capacities for inter-cultural communication and for cultural sensitivity and understanding, and to differentiate themselves from a closer, better-known, or more concretely defined group with which they also identified. We will define inter-cultural communication broadly, in the way that Eurobarometer #217 (2007) has: "interaction with people of different cultural backgrounds." Most interviewees discussed feeling European in all three of these contexts, though some spoke of only one or two.

Those who identify with Europe on the basis of utility see European integration as a facilitator of their personal, economic, and social interests. In this context, interviewees were clear that the European identity that they felt was an identification with the European Union rather than a larger, general Europe. In most other contexts, this distinction was not explicit. We will look first at responses dealing with economic utility. As interviewees rarely discussed economic utility for their nations or other larger groups, we will highlight here what interviewees did discuss: economic utility for themselves personally and for other individuals.

In line with Eurobarometer survey data gathered in 2006, the most prevalent vision of what constitutes being a citizen of the European Union for this study's participants seems to be the freedom to travel, study, or work anywhere within the EU. Nearly every interviewee discussed the opportunity and relative ease of work or study in other EU member states, whether they had actualized such an opportunity or not. For one respondent, economic opportunities constituted the sole identity connection to Europe.

"Europe is only economic. I feel Italian always. But I speak English, so I can work anywhere. That makes me feel European." (Marco)

For all others, economic utility was only one of many factors encouraging European identification. The following comments express neatly the feeling of most interviewees toward economic opportunities for individuals:

"Without borders...there are opportunities to work anywhere...I will always go home, but I want to take advantage of ('sfruttarne') every opportunity to learn a new language and to know a new culture. I can do this when I have a job in another country...we [Slovenians] don't have to go abroad for work, but many people want to learn something and meet people and then go back." (Tina)

Many also spoke of both the real and the symbolic utility of the common currency and of European passports and even European passport holder queues in airports. These

logistical details act as powerful reminders of European identity and of European integration.

In terms of social utility, many interviewees indicated just as Risse suggests: European identity offers an alternative to current or historical troubles attached to national identity. Indeed, just as Risse has observed, all four German respondents at least made mention of European identity as a means of overcoming a German national identity strongly associated with racism and militaristic nationalism. Their comments were in keeping with the following statement:

"I think Germans have had and still have huge difficulties with being proud of their nation...nationality...after the Second World War. So, many Germans like to see themselves as European because this gives them an alternative identity, like a nation, without feeling stuck with the mistakes of the past. I expect that other countries feel less European as they did not have to break with their own history, so their national identity is still stronger than the European one." (Johann)

Similarly, an interviewee from the French-speaking region of Belgium believed that European identity was particularly useful, and perhaps dearer, to Belgians than to citizens of other European countries.

"I feel European always. So do others Belgians, because we are not Belgians like the French are French...Belgium is like two countries with two different languages, cultures... I had to learn Flemish for nine years because in schools it is obligatory, but I

remember very little ('pochissimo'), because I don't want to remember ... There must be the desire to be part of the culture and to let the culture be part of you. We don't have this for Belgium, so for us there is Europe." (Gregory)

Another interviewee—an Italian from the province of Napoli—suggested that a nation's unflattering current affairs were also grounds for choosing to identify oneself with a less culpable supranational identity, in this case, Europe.

"What people know of Italy from the news is corruption...trash in Napoli...I am from Napoli, and I don't want to be associated with [trash and corruption]...Other Italians, not from Napoli, don't want to be associated with these things either...Napoli's problems are Italy's face to the world right now. It could be better for us to be European than Italian." (Veronica)

Identifying with a less tangible political or social group, then, is advantageous in this context, because how an abstract group is viewed varies from viewer to viewer and can be tailored according to personal needs. As such, identifying with an abstract group may allow the individual to avoid shame associated with a more concretely defined identity group to which he or she belongs. In both Veronica's and Gregory's cases, identifying with Europe here appears to be appealing as a means of shedding undesirable group associations rather than affirming that EU institutions are less corrupt or more effective.

Still more interviewees, particularly those of 2004 accession member states, confirmed Risse's observation that for many member states, Europe signifies progress and modernization.

"Being European means for me to live in this continent with other people and share the same or similar history in some points...Our country as a member of EU definitely helps show our people that Europe should be uniform [sic] and help its states." (Pavla)

This response is particularly interesting, as it opens the social utility of the EU to Europe as a whole—a view which many interviewees left untouched.

European identity as a description of character and social values was the context in which interviewees spoke at greatest length of feeling European. In most cases, the concept of "European identity" was employed as a descriptor of a wide ranging set of inter-cultural communication skills and cosmopolitan sensitivities. Interviewees sought to illustrate these skills most often by giving examples of their travel savvy, their general historical and cultural understanding, and their foreign language proficiencies.

All 25 interviewees expressed finding affirmation of their European identity in travel through Europe or the possibility of that travel and saw travel as an indicator of learning and desire for intercultural understanding. Travel and the ease of travel in Europe was the only context in which interviewees consistently used a first person plural pronoun--such as "we" or "us"--to refer to Europeans.

"To meet someone and know we've been to the same places...that we have been to

Barcelona and we know Paris...This connects us too. Maybe it's not exclusively European, but we feel connected in this way." (Sabine)

"It is so easy for us. We have Ryan Air, and we can go where we want even only for a weekend...In Europe, it is so easy to be in another country, so we have to speak more than one language." (Mariangela)

On the whole, interviewees pointed to learning opportunities—both those they had experienced and those they anticipated—as whetting appetites for better language skills and for more thorough historical and cultural understanding of other European member states. For this reason, many reported seeking out prolonged stays in other EU member states, usually for work or for study and cited these experiences as formative in the development of their European identity.

As a result, interviewees viewed the foreign language skills they had developed as distinct and definite markers of their European identity and as confirmation of this identity to themselves and to others.

"When I go somewhere and I can communicate in a foreign language, then I feel European." (Monika)

"Speaking another language makes you part of the community...you can already be a more elite member of the community...We are only students, but we are already the European elite." (Sabine)

Conversely, others linked European identity to language skills and communication competencies by noting that they felt their European identity receding when they were not able to communicate in a foreign language or when their language skills were in some way inadequate.

"Sometimes tourists speak German, but I would rather speak to them in English. I would feel too passive to speak with them in my language...I don't want to be rude, but to avoid the bad feeling of not speaking another language, you begin complimenting them: 'Oh I wish that my Chinese were as good as your German.'...It's a kind of mechanism...I am European, and I want to represent that well." (Sabine)

"I really dislike the fact that when I go abroad, I don't have as good an understanding of languages as other Europeans have...I feel ignorant." (Helena)

"I feel European all the time...If I spoke better French, I think I would feel more European, too...My language skills are better than most Irish and significantly better than the British, but in comparison to other Europeans, they are worse for sure." (Andrea)

There appears to be a good deal of validity in interviewees' claims that European identity signifies a kind of linguistic and cultural competence. Fligstein (2008) argues that a main source of identity formation is in opportunity to interact positively with

people from other European countries, and as a result, those Europeans who have and who have invested themselves in learning other European languages or in deepening their understanding of other European states are more likely to be those who feel a stronger European identity.

This is supported by the 2007 Eurobarometer survey, "Young Europeans," which found that Europeans ages 15-29 believed the most useful skills for finding a desirable job were those of communication, teamwork, experience, and knowledge of foreign languages. The survey revealed also that foreign language difficulties were the principal reason that many young Europeans felt it might be difficult to find a job in another European country, perhaps distancing the opportunity for extended interaction another European member state and its people and culture (#202: 6). Furthermore, the 2005 ELAN study finds that the need for language skills in European enterprises is high and will only increase in the future. In surveying nearly 2,000 exporting SMEs across 29 European states, the study shows that at least 11% of these companies were conscious of having lost a considerable amount of business due to lack of language skills. 60% of companies surveyed felt English was insufficient for realizing export aspirations (39). While English was reported as useful for gaining initial access to a market, ELAN study survey respondents acknowledged that linguistic and cultural knowledge of the target country were indispensable (6). Companies therefore expressed a preference for potential employees already in possession of language skills rather than having to invest in language training (6). Thus, opportunities to develop a European identity are more readily available to those with certain communicative competencies, and as such, "European

identity" as a descriptor of these communicative capacities could indeed hold some semantic value.

The third major context in which interviewees presented their European identities was that of differentiating themselves from a closer, better-known, or more concretely defined group—usually a national group—with which they also identified. Interviewees expressed certain boundaries around their national identities (see following section). Some even described feelings of tightness for which identification with Europe seemed to offer some relief. Perceived limitations of the preexisting group identity were generally described as insufficient interest in or apathy toward improving communication skills and inter-cultural understanding.

Many also indicated that the cultural and communication skills they had honed while abroad continued to stimulate feelings of European identity at home. Thus, if discussing immigration—or even foreign visitors—in their country, interviewees sought to separate themselves from national groups and to adhere to a European identity as a more accurate representation their feelings.

"At home, I tend to feel closer to other cultures [than to British culture], no doubt as a matter of well-meaning, dough-headed, sloppy thought processes..." (Dan)

"My friends, they don't care, they don't think about this at all. They just think about

Siena, Siena and enough!...I am traveling, I am studying English, they are just Siena, Palio, contrade! They don't travel, they don't study [other languages], they think I am crazy. I think it's not me." (Eugenio)

*"I find that most British people won't even try to speak another language, because most people [in other countries] have English as a second, third, fourth language...If I am abroad, I always make an effort to learn key phrases and to learn when I am there."
(Helena)*

Along these same lines, many interviewees commented that the language skills of their compatriots were inferior to those of unspecified "Europeans." Asked how their personal language skills compared to those of their co-nationals, most interviewees estimated that their own were better or even much better. None of the European identifiers interviewed in this study gauged their language skills to be worse than those of their co-nationals.

Some interviewees—particularly those from Britain—further distinguished themselves from others of their national group by noting their co-nationals' reluctance or unwillingness to identify themselves with Europe or the European Union. This suggests an attitude among European identifiers that European identity represents an awareness which those who do not identify themselves with Europe do not possess. One respondent captured succinctly the general sentiment.

"I feel very European, but I am constantly aware that this is unusual...I consider other British people as European, but I don't think that they are aware of this." (Claire)

Just as this statement seems to imply, Thomas Risse observes that the identity divergence is not so much between nationalists and die-hard Europeans, but rather between those who identify themselves more exclusively with the nation-state and those who include Europe in their political and social identity. We will explore this further in the following section.

Contexts of National Identity

The preceding discussion of European identity is not to say that these individuals who identify themselves with the European Union do not also identify with their national groups. On the contrary, interviewees frequently expressed strong ties to their national identities, and they did so in ways that we can analyze through four general frames. The first deals with acknowledgments of certain boundaries delineating how interviewees see what makes up the meat of their national identities. While European identity, just like the European Union was seen as having more malleable, further-reaching borders, national identities were described as being more restrictive and more difficult to acquire by learning. The second frame deals with ways of doing things –both (grand and mundane)– that interviewees felt were somehow specific to their nation. The third deals with the reactions of others from outside interviewees' respective nations toward interviewees'

national identities. And lastly, the fourth frame seeks to describe the particular intimacies of national identity in which many interviewees felt included.

As we have seen, interviewees did not express an exclusive sense of national identity. However, most believed that there were distinct traits that they felt to be inherent to those sharing their nationality. They tended to present these traits with qualifiers, such as "It's a silly thing, but..." (Claire), or "It sounds ridiculous, but..." (Lizzie). Nonetheless, these traits, however quirky, constituted a significant part of identifying with the nation for interviewees.

Interviewee: Italian style. You can see it.

Interviewer: So you feel Italian when you see it in others, or when you feel you have it yourself?

Interviewee: When I put my sunglasses on. [...] I feel completely not Italian when I am eating fruit like this [eating an apple off the core]. [...] We maybe only eat fruit after dinner, and then cut in slices, on a plate, with a fork. [...] You can tell I've lived abroad for so long.

(Veronica)

"[Being Czech] is a state of mind...We have bloody black sense of humor...worse we feel, better jokes we make." (Frantisek)

Particular processes or ways of doing things were also mentioned frequently as evoking a sense of national identity. Sometimes these processes were mentioned in the

context of travel, to say they were not observed until they were in a place that did not approach a comparable issue in the same way. Otherwise, interviewees expressed that certain actions simply made them feel very strongly of their nationality.

"I am proud of Germany for our ecological food...We are very careful of this, and very strong in our environmental movement. You can't find that so easily in many other countries." (Sabine)

"Watching Rugby always makes you feel Irish." (Andrea)

"I feel more British abroad than in Great Britain...we are renowned for how atrocious our language skills are...we don't start language training till age 11 and languages are no longer compulsory after age 14..." (Dan)

Another powerful reminder of national identity for interviewees was the response of others from outside their nation to how much they appeared to be of their national identity. This was not portrayed as a positive experience by any of the participants in this study, although some tried to relate being called out in such a way as a humorous matter, and others presented themselves as being resigned toward it.

"I go to England and all I say is 'Hello' and they are already shouting at me 'Pasta! Mafia! I love Italy!'" (Eugenio)

"In Italy, they make a big deal about being Scandinavian and how we are so different...and then you start to feel like you are....When I say I am from Sweden, people say, 'Why aren't you blond?'" (Monika)

Beyond clichés of national identity, several interviewees—six, particularly—expressed a profound intimacy with their respective nations and nationalities. This is to say that they stated outright that their nationality had shaped their personal identity and connected them deeply and positively to their country and their compatriots. Descriptions of this national intimacy focused on a sense that because of a shared language, culture, and history, they could intuitively grasp something of the nature of their compatriots. To a greater degree than other interviewees, they stressed that their national identity had shaped their personal character. Those who felt these bonds most powerfully tended to be from relatively small countries, and more powerful still were the responses of those from more recent member states, such as the Czech Republic and Slovenia.

"Being Czech means for me much more than being European. I am proud of myself as a Czech, of our language, which is unique...I am also proud of our famous people, footballers, hockey players...who represent our state abroad and show that in such a small country can be nice and good people too..." (Pavla)

"Slovenia was a 'case-study' for the EU... We [Slovenians] have so many identities, we always have. Our old people, maybe some, feel Yugoslavian because they fought for that...Lots of Bosnians, Croatians, Serbians, escaped into Slovenia for a better life. They keep their culture. They are not Slovenian. They are going back, especially Serbians,

every holiday...Nothing has changed in that we have to use another language or several other languages to communicate with the rest of the world and to identify ourselves with a larger group. It is just that the language we have to use is different and the group—like now the EU—has changed. Now the language is English mostly... Old people are maybe afraid that we young people treat Slovenia like our step-child, but it should be our baby. But Europe is an opportunity to learn to build our identity as Slovenians. Every language we learn, it is an identity added. I wouldn't want to be American, French, English, Italian, or from any of these enormous countries ['paesi grandissimi'] because they don't have to learn foreign languages or they don't have to learn them so well as we do...We have security in Slovenia. You know the expression, 'We have America at home' ['America abbiamo a casa']? We have the American dream here." (Tina)

These clichés, analogies, and references to family reflect a feeling of innateness around national identity. Overall, interviewees reveal a belief that the part of identity imparted by the nation is, at least to a certain degree, inborn. This stands in contrast to attitudes regarding “Europeanness,” which interviewees present as an identity earned or acquired through travel, study, and conscientiously developed communication skills. European identity, then, is perhaps an identity to which interviewees feel they have been naturalized rather than an identity inherited. European identity represents something to which individuals and groups—even national groups—may aspire, as a marker of achievement and progress.

"Most Czechs and people from different countries living in Czech Republic feel like being European. For example, I have a friend coming from Africa, Tanzania, who feels like European because he has been living here for more than ten years." (Gabča)

Still, some interviewees acknowledge that European identity seems too vague, too abstract, to ensure lasting political participation. They suggest that calling themselves "European" might be a more expedient way to articulate a less tangible feeling about the communicative skills they feel that they have acquired.

"Maybe 'European is not the correct expression...what my dad says seems to fit better, 'World Citizen,' but this sounds a little cheesy..." (Lizzie)

"The funny thing is that when I think of the word 'European,' I think of being continental, like France or Germany or something Western European and continental. But when I think of myself as being 'European' or peers or other people then I am thinking of something different, of learning languages, of traveling...being able to travel or study in other countries and doing it...But I am still thinking of other countries as other countries and that I like to go to other countries and to meet people who come from other countries...Maybe they seem European, too, but I am still thinking of them as this person from another country...I don't think that the nation-state is becoming obsolete."
(Monika)

IX. Conclusions

This study shows that many who identify themselves with the European Union do so because they feel that they have actively built social capital in this polity and that they have done so in a way that reflects the perceived ideals of the EU as a polity. Political identification entails feeling equipped to communicate in a meaningful way with most others in the political community. Participants revealed little desire to discuss EU institutions and organizations in order to express their connection to the EU. We may interpret this result as a check from exclusive binding of these European identities to the European Union.

This may mean that in the future, as EU institutions become more established and more concretely defined, European identifiers such as the participants in this study may find identification with a still less tangible “globalized society” or world community more appropriate.

Another important finding of this study is that these participants do not see supranational identity (in this case European identity) as a threat to national identity.

Nationality continues to represent a primary source of political identity for most of the individuals interviewed here. This confirms the contextual nature of identity and the presences of multiple layers of identity in every individual. The flexibility of European identity and the range of communicative abilities interviewees associate with it represent the most appealing aspect of identifying oneself with the European Union for interviewees in this study. Further study in conjunction with the development of EU institutions will be necessary to see if the communicative skills linked here to the EU continue to be associated with a European identity for these individuals. This will be especially important to watch as, in time, institutions become more concretely defined and any conservative policy measures may erode the relatively progressive image that the European Union now enjoys. This might, in effect, cause individuals such as the participants in this study to transfer the communicative skills they associate with the European Union to a less restrictive entity.

At any rate, we see that the “virtuous cycle” of integration laid out by Fligstein—increasing economic interdependence leading to increased political integration which leads to further economic interdependence—also translates into personal identity: increased opportunities for positive interaction tend to lead to positive interactions which stir social identification, which encourages further positive interactions. We should explore, then, how social capital can inform and shape the construction of political institutions at the supranational level.

This study shows that for those who assume a European identity, this act tends to be an expedient yet still expressive articulation of a set of skills that an individual believes to be essential to success in a supranational community. When seeking an

“Other” against which to highlight the importance of these skills, a national other is the most comfortable choice, as individuals tend to feel most familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of their national community and feel that within this national context, they can gauge their own skills most appropriately. Similarly, when they describe communicative skills they wish to acquire and deem necessary for a successful supranational political society, they tend to describe these skills as being characteristic of general “Europeans.”

These findings confirm the view that European identity is dynamic and that communicative actions play a vital role in identity formation. European identity is in fact relational, as Triandafyllidou (2008) has suggested, but less in relation to any particular “Other” and more in relation to the contexts in which an individual perceives his or her communicative skills to be most valued. Whether these individuals and others like them continue to associate communicative skills necessary for positive, supranational interactions with the EU will depend on the extent to which EU institutions respond to the development of social capital.

Appendix I: Study Participants

Name	Sex	Age	Nationality		Foreign Languages Studied (Years Studied)	Occupation	Language of Interview
Andrea	F	22	Irish	English	Hebrew (5), Irish (5), French (3)	student	English
Claire	F	24	British	English	German (3), Dutch (1)	student	English
Dan	M	25	British	English	German (8)	Law student	English
Eugenio	M	38	Italian	Italian	English (3)	Wheat farmer	English
Francesca	F	30	Italian	Italian	English (4)	Administrative assistant	Italian
František	M	25	Czech	Czech	English (12), German (4)	Student	English
Gabča	F	22	Czech	Czech	English (10), German (4), Spanish (1)	Student	English
Gregory	M	23	Belgian	French	Flemish (9), Italian (6), English (4), Spanish (2)	Student	Italian
Ilaria	F	22	Italian	Italian	English (10), French (2)	Student	Italian
Johann	M	28	German	German	English (15), Latin (4), Swedish (3)	Technology specialist	English
Lizzie	F	22	German	German	English (13), Spanish (6)	Student	English
Marco	M	32	Italian	Italian	English (15)	Financial advisor	Italian
Mariangela	F	28	Italian	Italian	English (8)	Film production assistant	Italian
Milena	F	24	Czech	Czech	English (12), German (3)	Student	English
Monika	F	26	Swedish	Swedish	English (17), German (6)	student	English
Olivia	F	20	British	English	German (4), Spanish (2)	Student	English
Pavla	F	23	Czech	Czech	English (10), German (6)	Pre-school teacher	English
Sabine	F	26	German	German	English (12), French (5), Italian (2)	Student	English
Stefania	F	28	Romanian	Romanian	English (12), Italian (6)	Student	Italian
Tina	F	27	Slovenian	Slovenian	Italian (10), English (8), German (6), French (3)	Marketing	Italian
Veronica	F	23	Italian	Italian	English (20), French (6)	Student	Italian
Yann	M	35	French	French	English (18)	Public Relations	English
Zuzka	F	27	Slovak	Slovak	English (12), French (8)	Teacher	English

Note: Interviews were conducted during the month of May 2008 in Siena, Italy.

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